



Fall weed control, money well spent?

By Chad Burley, CCA

In the current economic climate it is important to spend your money wisely and get the most “bang for your buck”. So why should you spend money in the fall to control weeds that are eventually going to die anyway this winter? Here are a few reasons to consider.

Improved soil conditions in the spring

Heavy weed infestation of perennial and annual weeds in the field can be a hindrance in the spring. Heavy rotting green matter shelters the soil and slows down drying. Less cover on the soil surface also increases cultivation speeds and may cut down on the amount of tillage required to prepare the seed bed. In the case of no-till planting, less cover allows for better seed placement and accuracy by reducing the amount of trash that must be moved ahead of the drill.

Improved weed control

Did you know that perennial and winter annual weeds can experience winter kill? In the fall, perennial and winter annual weeds prepare for the cold by moving their stores of energy into their roots. By comparison, most annual weeds put their energy into producing seeds throughout the summer and release their seeds as the plant starts to die in the fall. For annual weeds the only benefit of early fall herbicide applications may be to help reduce the weed seed bank in the soil. For perennial weeds such as dandelion, field bindweed, milkweed, Canada thistle, perennial sow thistle and dogbane it can be a key time to gain the upper hand in control. Winter annuals such as chickweed, Shepherd’s-purse and stinkweed are also easier to kill at this time of year.

Glyphosate type chemicals such as Roundup, Touchdown IQ, Vantage Plus and Credit can be extremely successful against tough to control perennials and winter annuals in the fall. They are translocated into the root, effectively weakening the plant and making it harder for the plant to survive the winter. If the plant does survive the winter, it will have fewer reserves to push out a large plant in the spring. Hormone based

chemicals such as Banvel II and 2, 4-D control weeds by causing rapid growth in fall perennials, also lowering root reserves, leading to weaker plants in the winter and spring. In some cases, registered combinations of the fall applied chemicals can also give you an added punch in the control of these weeds.

Another advantage of fall herbicide programs are that the minimum recommended rate may effectively control weeds that require higher rates at other times of the year. Amitrol, Banvel II, 2, 4-D, and Glyphosate are all registered for post-harvest weed control. Consult a certified agronomist for more information on hard to control species of weeds. If you doubt that fall weed control will work for you, consult with a CCA to set up a side by side plot. Be sure to rate the control throughout the next season.

Cautions and Concerns

The autumn season often brings cooler weather and rain. These conditions cause the perennial weeds to become lush and succulent. In cooler weather it is important to give the herbicide time to act. The plants grow slowly and the chemical will also take longer to work. It is generally recommended by OMAF that post-harvest weed control be applied 2 weeks before the first hard frost. In the case of perennial grasses the chemical industry generally supports spraying glyphosate after light frosts. Be sure to give the plant time to start growing again before applying the glyphosate. After a heavy frost there is no guarantee that the chemical will work. It is also important to pay attention to the growth stage of the weed. Some weeds are only effectively controlled during various stages of flowering.

When using products such as Banvel II or 2, 4-D in the fall, it is important to know what crop will be grown in the field during the next season. You should read the label carefully and be sure to observe any stated cropping restrictions. In the case of planting winter wheat, glyphosate is the only registered product for pre-plant use.

Chad Burley is a Certified Crop Adviser employed by Thompsons Limited in Blenheim.

There are over 500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA) in Ontario. Each CCA has demonstrated their knowledge about Ontario crop production by passing the required exams. In addition, they have the crop advisory experience, the education, the commitment to continuing education and have signed a comprehensive code of ethics, which places the grower’s interests first.



This industry driven program helps ensure that Ontario crop producers are well served by those providing their crop production advice. This article was written by one of those CCA’s.